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GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
EIGHTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Savannah, Ga., February 12, 1920.

In accordance with the by-laws, I submit the Eighty-first Annual Report of the President.

OFFICERS AND CURATORS.

During the year Mr. Wm. W. Mackall, who has been a curator since February 12, 1902, and who, as President for the five years preceding the annual meeting of 1919, so successfully brought about the resumption by the Society of the possession and use of its building and its books on establishment of the municipal public library, and also the inauguration of the Georgia Historical Quarterly, presented his resignation as a curator, which was accepted by the Board with much regret. Judge Beverly D. Evans, Judge of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of Georgia, was elected to fill Mr. Mackall's unexpired term.

The terms of Messrs. Charles Ellis, Wm. W. Gordon, Alexander C. King, Wm. W. Williamson and Beverly D. Evans expire at this meeting and their successors will be elected at this meeting to serve for three years.

MEMBERSHIP.

During the year just closed the membership dues were changed from \$10 for male residents of Chatham County, and \$5 for all other active members, to a uniform charge of \$5 per annum, with the hope and expectation that this would result in such an increase of membership as to bring a larger income from dues. The Committee on Membership, Mr. W. W. Williamson, Chairman, which was appointed during the

year, ably assisted by Mr. Otis Ashmore, Vice President and Corresponding Secretary, has been diligent and the following is the paying membership to-day as compared with last year :

Class	1919	1920	In-crease	De-crease
Residents Chatham Co., Men - - -	84	202	118	
“ “ “ Women - - -	35	55	20	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
Total - - -	119	257	138	
Non-Residents “ “ Men - - -	174	166		8
“ “ “ “ Women - - -	14	22	.8	
“ “ “ “ Organiza- tions - - -	5	5	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total - - -	193	193	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
Grand Total Active Members - - -	312	450	138	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	

On the assumption that all members pay their dues, the result after taking into consideration the reduction of dues for male residents of Chatham County would bring an income from dues of \$2,250.00 in the coming year as compared with \$2,080.00 on the old basis for the preceding year. The actual collection of dues however during the year 1919 was \$1,818.80 for 1919 and \$240.00 for prior years. The number of persons, men and women, but chiefly men, whose reputation and standing are good, but who are willing to enroll themselves as members of such an organization as this and persistently fail to pay the dues for a series of years is astonishing. I do not attempt to explain.

FINANCES.

Your cash balance of a year ago was 13 cents with no unpaid current bills. This was exclusive of the permanent fund established with small beginnings in 1912, consisting of cash and securities with a book value, and approximately a market value, of \$2,627.64, which during the year has been increased by current accumulations to \$2,918.69. It is estimated that, after making reasonable allowances for default in the payment of dues, the Society's requirements for the coming year will exceed its prospective income by approximately \$900. During the year there was a deficit, and by authority of the curators a bank loan of \$1,000 was made to meet current bills. The repayment of this loan, which is not included in the estimate, would increase the deficit to \$1,900.

This change in financial condition is easily accounted for by the assumption of expenses, some which the Society had never previously incurred and some of which it had been relieved for many years because its building and its library had been devoted to the use of the city, chiefly at the city's expense. We now keep Hodgson Hall open for the accommodation of members and we have added the publication of the Quarterly. These items add approximately \$2,500 to our annual expenses. This report will recommend to you action which is closely allied to the question of finances, and I make no recommendation at this point.

LIBRARY.

Under the efficient administration of Mr. Wm. Harden, who has been Librarian for more than fifty years, the library has been open for the use of members on week-days from 3 p. m., to 6:30 p. m., and on Saturdays from 8 p. m., to 10 p. m. The expense of this has been greater than the finances of the Society justify, and yet no one can claim that, if it is to be used at all, these hours can be cut down. The attendance is small and the members make but little use of it. It is claimed (not without justification) that longer hours would increase its

usefulness. They would also increase the expense and the Society cannot meet it. Your finances have not permitted for several years the purchase from time to time of necessary additions to the library, and particularly of books and compilations relating to the world war. If we are forced to pursue the present policy of inaction your library will soon be entirely out of date. If its usefulness is to continue it will not be sufficient to provide additional funds to take care of the current deficit, but we must add enough for the necessary accretions to the library.

TELFAIR ACADEMY.

The Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, of which this Society is trustee, began the year with a cash balance of \$885.42 and no debts. The cash balance to-day is \$2,944.29. Attendance in 1919 (all free) was 6,574 against 4,921 for the preceding year. We had four exhibits during the year; in April war pictures by Johansen, with an attendance of 1,252; in May an exhibit of French war posters, with an attendance of 497; in June an exhibit of war drawings, with an attendance of 374; and in December an exhibit of portraits by American women, with an attendance of 867. These figures are disappointing. When will Savannah realize that she possesses the best small Art Collection in America?

During the year the Academy has acquired *La Madrilénita*, by Robert Henri, at a cost of \$2,000, less the usual discount of 25 per cent to public galleries—a valued addition to our gallery.

A HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

It was my privilege to make the annual report at the celebration of the Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Society in 1914, and I took occasion to give a brief retrospect and resume of its history, which was published and distributed with the interesting account of that celebration. Now that you have again honored me with the presidency it is my duty to call attention to this history without repeating it. In the first ten years the

Society published three volumes of "Collections" and no other was published for twenty-five years. During the next twenty-eight years two volumes were published, and two more in the succeeding four years. From the time of the consolidation into your Society of the Savannah Library Society in 1849 to the time of the dedication of your building and your library to the public use in 1903, a period of fifty-four years, the Georgia Historical Society was little more than a circulating library—strictly a local institution. During this period it published only six volumes of collections, and twenty-one pamphlets which bore its name, but many of which were actually published by the authors. Its claim during these fifty-four years to be an active historical society stood on a slender foundation, and its activities as a circulating library made it strictly a local institution. Never until the year 1917 did it have a non-resident of Chatham County as an officer or a curator. The number of its occasional non-resident members was so small as to be negligible. The fact that it had failed to make of itself a state historical society as contemplated by its charter, and had become strictly a local institution whose chief function was to maintain a circulating library, seems not to have been appreciated until within the past few years, when efforts were made to get non-resident members. Diligent work has been done in this line, but that the Society is still mainly local is shown by the fact that the active membership of today consists of 257 residents and 193 non-residents of Chatham County. Chatham County has less than four per cent. of the population of the State. Neither the curators nor the Society has ever met outside of Savannah. In the state at large the Society is little known.

TWO HISTORICAL SOCIETIES.

During the past quarter century there has been great improvement in the educational facilities of Georgia, and particularly in the faculties of her colleges for men and women. We have now in these faculties a goodly number of trained technical historians with Doctors' degree, who are qualified to

take active and practical interest in the history of the state and to help this Society in the declared purpose of its charter, "of collecting, preserving and diffusing information relating to the history of the state of Georgia in particular, and American history generally."

Not unnaturally regarding the Georgia Historical Society as a local institution, which had during far the larger part of its life subordinated its proper functions to the maintenance of a local circulating library, a group of these qualified historians, and other Georgians outside of Chatham County who were willing to contribute to a laudable purpose, formed the "GEORGIA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION," which is now in its fourth year and has a reasonable prospect of being established on a firm basis. Its annual dues are low—lower than ours on the new basis. It has moved slowly, however, and its expenses are light, with the result that its finances are in good condition. It has determined to publish a quarterly magazine under the title of "Georgia Historical Review." Your Society has entered a respectful protest against the similarity in name of the new Association and of the new publication, but it is hoped that this protest will be unimportant if you approve the recommendation of your Curators.

Wisely realizing the difficulties of maintaining a creditable quarterly historical magazine when supported only by the dues of members, the officers of the Georgia Historical Association have secured from public-spirited Georgians subscriptions to an ample guarantee fund deemed sufficient to take care of the cost of publication for two or three years; an example which, if we continue in our present isolated state, it will be necessary for us to follow. Pending the negotiations which I am about to lay before you, Georgia Historical Association has courteously suspended inauguration of its quarterly.

If we have not completed the demonstration of them, we are now clearly demonstrating two facts: (1) that the Georgia Historical Society, as a local institution, cannot be properly maintained and cannot creditably perform the functions of a state historical society, and will not faithfully or successfully

perform the functions for which it was chartered, until in fact and in spirit it shall become a state institution; and (2) that a state which has not yet been able to maintain one active, efficient, useful and influential historical society cannot now maintain two. Georgia is the largest of the Southeastern States, and perhaps the most prosperous. Georgians are no less public-spirited than are citizens of her sister states. Georgia can sustain a creditable historical society, but it will require the cordially united effort of all Georgians who are sufficiently interested in the history of their state to give to its collection, preservation and dissemination their money or their time, or both.

Firmly convinced that this disastrous division of interests and activities was founded on no cause which could not be removed, your Curators with the cordial co-operation of officers of Georgia Historical Association arranged a full conference between officers of the two organizations, as to which I am pleased to report that I have never attended one in which was manifested less selfish pride of opinion or more desire to promote the best interests of the whole state.

The Association has appointed a committee of which Dr. R. P. Brooks, formerly De Renne Professor of Georgia History at the University of Georgia, a trained historian and now residing in Macon, is Chairman, to meet a similar committee to be appointed by your Society for the purpose of approving a plan of union of these organizations for the common welfare.

The discussion at the conference was distinctly informal and no plans were formulated. Many suggestions of principle were made and no differences of opinion developed. It was clearly recognized that a necessary basis was the transfer by Georgia Historical Association of its roll of members to membership in the Georgia Historical Society under its ancient charter now eighty-one years old. I am instructed by the Board of Curators to present this question for your consideration with their unanimous recommendation for prompt appointment of a committee of moderate size, authorized and instructed to meet the Association's committee and report back

to the Society at the earliest practical date for its approval a plan of union, with such changes in Constitution and By-laws as it may involve. I lay this recommendation before you and trust that you will act upon it at this meeting.

Through the generosity of Mrs. Margaret Telfair Hodgson there is held in trust for the exclusive use and benefit of your Society, Hodgson Hall, a handsome library building in Savannah and the ground on which it stands. This trust property is not subject to your disposal and can be used for no other purposes than those of a historical society. You own in fee the vacant half lot immediately south of Hodgson Hall. You have a permanent fund started with small beginnings in 1912 and now amounting to \$2,918.69. The annual accretions to this permanent fund are approximately \$200.00. These include your interest in the R. J. Nunn Trust Fund which may be relied on to add to the permanent fund approximately \$70.00 per annum, and will probably show a very slight increase in each year on account of the accumulations of the trust fund. You own about 40,000 volumes and many thousands of pamphlets a valuable library not up to date. Your liabilities are \$1,000 borrowed to meet current deficit of the closing year, and your budget shows a permanent deficit. You have 450 members obligated to pay dues aggregating \$2,250.00 per annum. Besides these material possessions you have a history which, while not broad in achievement, is honorable and unstained, with no black marks, and has a historical background of eighty-one years.

Against this resume of what you have to offer to new members, let us not forget what we lack. For seventy-five years we remained content as a strictly local organization and failed to foster or to use the interest of other Georgians in Georgia history, and during nearly all of those years we subordinated the functions of a historical society to those of a local circulating library. It would be difficult to defend your Society against the charge that it has not made full use of the franchise with which the state entrusted it in 1839. When we consider the facts we are surprised, not that Georgians in other parts of

the state have now rebelled and determined to work independently of us, but that they have waited so long to do so.

A moment's thought will clearly show that the union cannot take place without certain changes. While nearly, if not quite all, of the incorporators named in the original charter of 1839 were residents of Chatham County, the charter is silent as to the domicile of the corporation. It may be fairly concluded, however, that the custom of eighty-one years and the location in Savannah of Hodgson Hall, so necessary to the housing of its valuable library, have fixed it in Chatham County but legal domicile does not control the place of meeting. The Society has never met anywhere except in Savannah—a mistaken policy which should be corrected even if there be no union of the two organizations. From the standpoint of the new Association the inducement to the amalgamation is the building of a state-wide organization which shall in no sense be local. The plan therefore necessarily involves meetings of the Society from time to time in various cities of the state of which Savannah would of course be one. As is the case with most state historical societies, this would probably result in but one meeting of the Society as such in each year. The Board of Curators, however, would meet more frequently. The membership of this Board must be state-wide. The officers of the society, other than the Librarian, would be selected without reference to residence. The quarterly magazine should be in charge of a board of editors composed of trained historians whom Georgia can now offer, with one of them as Editor-in-Chief. These suggestions are but the expression of my personal opinion, are not official, and are not a part of the recommendation of the Board of Curators. I mention them to assist in your understanding of what is involved in the proposition.

If we shall accomplish this union we shall have in Georgia what the state has long needed; one historical society of state-wide personnel, influence and activity, and that society would be the ancient Society which is yours. Its maintenance as an active, useful organization will not be an easy task, for Geor-

gians are yet to be educated in appreciation of the importance of such work, and persuaded of their duty to take part in it. The duty of our Savannah members will by no means terminate with this union. It is my earnest wish that none of you will drop membership, but that on the contrary more of you will participate in the expanded organization, not only that Savannah may continue to exert a large influence in it, but that she may not fail in her duty to the State. We have, I submit, a special duty greater than that of our fellow citizens. Nearly a century has passed since the state committed to us this charter. It committed it to us as Georgians. I have no condemnation for the course which you have pursued because of the reasons which brought it about and which I have touched upon; but the fact remains that we have seen fit to keep to ourselves this broad state-wide franchise, and, whether with or without justification and excuse, we have failed to perform one duty which the state undoubtedly expected of us—the enlistment into the activities of the Society of all Georgians without regard to local habitation. I hope we are now about to perform this duty, but we should indeed deserve censure if, when we shall have done so, we, who have for so long almost exclusively enjoyed these benefits, should now shirk the duties yet to come, because we are to share the benefits with so many others.

Respectfully submitted,

A. R. LAWTON,
President.